DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 436 749 CS 013 801

AUTHOR Moore, Paula
TITLE Reading Recovery Teacher Training: Communities of Learners Engaged in Inquiry.
INSTITUTION Reading Recovery Council of North America, Columbus, OH.
PUB DATE 1998-00-00
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Network News; p1-5 Spr 1998
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; *Early Intervention; Instructional Effectiveness; Primary Education; *Professional Training; Program Descriptions; *Reading Difficulties; *Reading Instruction; Student Needs; *Teacher Education; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Reading Recovery Projects; Social Constructivism

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the original design of the Reading Recovery teacher training program as it relates to sociocultural theory. It also discusses how two constructs implicit in the sociocultural theory (community of learners and the role of inquiry) relate to Reading Recovery training. The paper notes that sociocultural theory predicts that human knowledge is socially constructed through shared activities and communication, and that Reading Recovery teacher training is organized to provide both shared activities (teaching demonstrations) and opportunity for communication (discussions). It concludes that although the constructs of community-of-learners and inquiry are current North American frames for understanding teaching and learning, they were inherent in the original design of the Reading Recovery teacher training program. (RS)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 436 749

Reading Recovery Teacher Training: Communities of Learners Engaged in Inquiry.

by Paula Moore

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J F. Bussell
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CS 013 801

READING RECOVERY® COUNCIL OF NORTH AMERICA

Network News

Spring 1998

A Refereed Publication for Reading Recovery® Teacher Leaders, Site Coordinators, and Trainers in Canada and the United States.

In This Issue...

Communities of Learners Engaged in Inquiry 1
Missouri Teacher Leaders 5
Notes from the Editor 5
Followup Study for Reading Recovery in Plainfield, IL 6
Network of Support For Successful Implementation 10
New Publications and Products . 13
Getting the Most From Your Reading Recovery Program 14
Membership Ideas 17
Dates to Remember 17
Copyright Notice 17
Publications and Products 18
Membership Application 19
Positions Available 20

Network News

The *Network News*, a publication of the Reading Recovery Council of North America, is produced twice annually for Reading Recovery educators in Canada and the United States. Editorial offices are located at the

Texas Woman's University
Harris County Dept. of Ed.
c/o 3715 West Pine Brook Way
Houston, Texas 77059
713-694-6300 ext.312
Fax 281-461-6551
bdwes@accesscomm.net

Editor: Dianne Frasier

Reading Recovery Teacher Training:

Communities of Learners Engaged in Inquiry

PAULA MOORE
LEADER TRAINER
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE

In the Fall 1997 *Network News* I examined teacher training in relation to three models for teaching and learning: instructor-centered, student-centered, and community-centered (Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996). Typically, the theories on which these models are based have been used to predict how children learn and how they should be taught. However, the theories and consequent models can also be applied to predict teacher learning and education. I suggest that the original design of the Reading Recovery training program (Clay & Watson, 1983) closely follows the principles of a community-centered model of teacher education. By making explicit the implications of the theory that undergirds this model, Reading Recovery teacher leaders and trainers can better understand, plan for, and evaluate Reading Recovery training practices.

The purpose of this article is to examine the original design of the Reading Recovery teacher training program as it relates to sociocultural theory. In addition, I discuss how two constructs implicit in the sociocultural theory, a) community-of-learners and b) the role of inquiry, relate to Reading Recovery training.

Original Design of the Reading Recovery Teacher Training Program

As you read the description of the original design of the Reading Recovery teacher training program in Chapter 23 of *Observing Young Readers* (Clay and Watson, 1983), note the key elements that are essential to the design.

> We prepared teachers for the Reading Recovery program in a novel way, but a way which had many advantages. The key word in the development and implementation of the inservice program was again observation and learning that was embedded in the situation. One teacher taught one child. On the other side of a one-way screen the teacher's peers watched intently the child's behavior and the teacher's decisions. When the child struggled the observers anticipated the teacher's next move.
>
> These observing teachers were themselves being tutored, at the same time. Their tutor asked questions about the child's difficulties, and the teacher's decisions. That tutor was herself in training and how she ran the session was analyzed later with her tutor-trainer who had been present. (p. 192)

Nearly twenty years later this design is still effective in helping teachers learn to observe children's reading and writing behaviors and in facilitating changes in teaching practice. It is a simple, but brilliant, design for teacher education. An act as complex as teaching cannot be learned through the transmission of knowledge, that is, by being told how to teach. Teachers are really only able to understand teaching by engaging in teaching themselves, and through watching and discussing teaching. Skilled teacher decision-making is dependent on knowledge of how the variables (i.e., the student, the teacher, the books, the procedures) interact and influence each other. These are key elements of the original design that I noted:

- observation linked to the potential for learning,
- observers anticipating teacher moves, and

continued on next page

Reading Recovery Teacher Training:

continued from previous page

- the tutor (teacher leader) tutoring—asking questions about the child and the teaching.

In the next section I examine the sociocultural theory which I suggest explains why we train teachers as we do, and why it works.

Sociocultural Theory

In the history of psychology, topics like learning and problem-solving have typically been defined as processes which go on inside the head of each individual person. They have usually been studied through clinical experiments in which isolated individuals perform tasks set by the researcher (Mercer, 1995). In this classic tradition of experimental psychology, each experimental subject is seen merely as an individual representative of the human race, being studied objectively by scientists.

In the real world, however, human beings do not learn in a clinical void. From birth, and except in unusual circumstances (e.g., "wild" children or ware-housed orphans), children are surrounded by other people who interact with and communicate with them. As they mature, they become part of other social networks (e.g., school, college, church, work, volunteer organizations) that continue to shape their thinking, learning, and development through social interaction. When viewed from this reality, it is hard to imagine separating human learning and development from the social context. However, Vygotsky (1962, 1978), one of the major influences in sociocultural theory, proposed an alternative psychological theory that treats knowledge as something which is socially constructed.

How exactly did Vygotsky and those who interpret his theory (e.g., Bedrova & Leong, 1996; Berk & Winsler, 1995; Rogoff, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wertsch, 1985) think that knowledge is constructed in a social context? They suggest that it is through conversation and shared activity—parents cooing to newborns, children building a sand castle together, students studying about linguistics in a college course, teachers watching a teaching session and discussing it. Paradoxically, even the study of individual development in clinical settings involves talk and joint activity as the researcher explains what the subject is to do, and maybe even demonstrates some portion of the task, and the subject asks questions and provides responses, which the researcher calls data. Furthermore, the researcher analyzes and interprets the data according to her current theories and reports the interpretation to other participants in her research community. So, even in the clinical setting of studying an individual, communication and language sharing is going on within a social context of shared conventions and expectations.

In addition, for Vygotsky, language was central to learning and development. Vygotsky described language as a psychological tool, something each of us uses to make sense of experience. Language is also our essential cultural tool. We use it to share experience and to collectively, jointly, make sense of it. Language is a means for transforming experience into cultural knowledge and understanding. It is mainly through the medium of spoken and written language that successive generations of a society benefit from the experience of the past, and it is also language that each new generation uses to share, dispute, and define its own experience.

Language is, therefore, not just a means by which individuals can formulate ideas and communicate them, it is also a means for people to think and learn together. In Reading Recovery teacher training, language plays a key role: the Teacher Leader uses language to guide the teachers' construction of knowledge, teachers use language to question and challenge, and teachers gradually come to shift their thinking as they learn to use new language to describe learning and teaching.

So, although it is useful to describe language as having two functions, its cultural function (communicating) and its psychological one (thinking), they are not really separate. At the simplest level, whenever you talk, you have to think what to say, and think about what you hear. You may spend some time thinking about what people have said, what you said yourself, and what you might say on future occasions. Reading Recovery training offers teachers the chance to involve other people in their thoughts and to use conversation to develop their own thoughts.

Vygotsky emphasized that learning is not simply a matter of cultural reproduction. It also involves transformation. As the learner appropriates the knowledge and procedures encountered in interaction with others, he or she transforms them, constructing his or her own personal version. But in the process, he or she is also transformed: by taking over the culture's artifacts and practices, and their organizing cognitive structure, the learner modifies his or her own cognitive structures through which he or she perceives, interprets and organizes the world. Therefore, Rogoff, Matusov, and White (1996) use the term *transformation of participation* to describe learning. The notion of transformation of participation is especially useful in predicting how the understandings of teachers in Reading Recovery training are transformed through participation in observing and discussing teaching sessions. I returned to Chapter 23 in *Observing Young Readers* to find a description of transformation of participation.

> We wished to minimize the feelings of insecurity that teachers might initially feel about changing their teaching patterns and thinking differently about reading instruction. Teachers were invited to teach. They were reminded that they were experienced teachers and were urged to draw on their own experience when working with the children. It was considered economical to move both children and teachers gradually from their existing competencies rather than to demand at the outset new behaviors which might cause confusion and disrupt

continued on next page

Reading Recovery Teacher Training:

continued from previous page

established and efficient responses.

> New concepts and activities were demonstrated and discussed, and these became part of the teachers' procedures. As the course continued, it became obvious from the teachers' discussions that their view of the child's task and of their own roles were changing. Our teachers, at first, had their own theories about the task and the characteristics of their pupils. By the end of the year and after the in-service course, they had acquired new theories about how they and their pupils performed and how they should perform. They were now able to question, challenge, discuss, work out courses of action, and explain their decisions in ways they could all understand because these new theories were shared and explicit. (p. 194)

In Reading Recovery, we have tended to describe this transformation as a "shift." And we have particular transformations or shifts that we are looking for. Here is another excerpt from Chapter 23 to demonstrate the specific shifts:

> Topics raised by the teachers in these discussions suggested that their attention to the reading process was shifting from teaching for items of knowledge (letters known, words remembered), and from getting the child to habituate a skill or memorize a new element, to developing in the child the confidence and willingness to use a variety of strategies. Another feature of the shift in teaching was movement away from having the poor reader dependent on the teacher and towards teaching in such a way that the children had many opportunities to teach themselves. (pp. 198-199)

A construct that some educators have found useful when translating the sociocultural theory into practice is community of learners (Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996; Wells, 1994). If knowledge is socially constructed, then one needs a community in which to construct it. This concept has particular relevance to the Reading Recovery training in that teachers come together for a year-long training program and must learn to learn from each other, guided by the teacher leader, through discussion.

Community of Learners

Rogoff, Matusov, and White (1996) describe the community of learners construct in this way: a community of learners involves both active learners and a more skilled partner, who provides leadership and guidance, in a collaborative endeavor. Gordon Wells (1994) also describes a community of learners in his book, *Changing Schools from Within: Creating Communities of Inquiry*:

> Instead of the traditional model, in which knowledge and expertise are treated as vested in those with power and authority, whose responsibility it is to transmit them to those on lower levels in the hierarchy, I began to imagine a different model, based on communities of action and inquiry. Here, knowledge and expertise are a shared achievement, arising from joint engagement in challenging activities that are personally significant to the participants. (p. 8)

In terms of teacher education, in a community of learners, teachers become inquirers into their own practice in collaboration with other members of the community of their peers and colleagues. Following are some basic principles of a community-of-learners model suggested by Rogoff, Matusov, and White (1996) and Wells (1994):

Principles of a Community-of-Learners Model

- All participants are active, not just the instructor or not just the learner.
- The class organization involves dynamic group relations among class members who learn to take responsibility for their contribution to their own learning and to the group's functioning.
- The organization involves a community working together with all serving as resources to the others, with varying roles according to their understanding of the activity at hand and differing and shifting responsibilities.
- The discourse is often conversation, in the sense that people build on each other's ideas on a common topic, guided by the instructor.
- It is consistent within the community-of-learners model for the leader, under some circumstances, to provide extensive explanations to assist the group.
- In a community-of-learners, competition is replaced with collaboration and cooperation.
- In a community-of-learners, there is an atmosphere of trust that allows colleagues to challenge and tussle with ideas.

Note how the description of the original design of the Reading Recovery training program incorporates all the elements described above.

> During early training sessions, a tutor demonstrated testing or teaching and another modeled the discussion procedures for the new teachers. Demonstrations by the tutor were kept to a minimum and the first demonstrations by the teachers themselves began after six weeks. Children were brought to the in-service center, and a typical lesson was conducted for the teacher's peers. This provided several opportunities: the teacher's techniques were evaluated, gently, by her peers; the watching teachers had a chance to observe, from the outside, the tutorial situation which they usually worked inside, either as a teacher being tutored, or as a teacher tutoring a child; and the situation induced an objectivity among teachers in evaluating their own work.

continued on next page

Reading Recovery Teacher Training:

continued from previous page

> None enjoyed giving a demonstration lesson but almost all commented on its value. They described their ordeal as a 'very nerve-wracking experience', which they dreaded, but a profitable one because 'one was reinforced for some things and was shown ways of improving'. They felt the sessions made them more aware, as teachers, of their own choices and assumptions, and more self-critical. The discussion among the observers as the child and teacher worked was described by the teachers as 'invaluable'. (Clay & Watson, 1983, p. 197)

Often, teachers who have been isolated in a school culture that evaluates, rather than supports, find it difficult to operate in a community of learners. They misinterpret the discussion around teaching as a personal affront, rather than as a tool for the group's learning. Therefore, teacher leaders may need to spend time talking with training groups about the community-of-learners model and about both the teacher leader's and the teachers' roles. Specifically, teacher leaders may need to support teachers' efforts as they move from defensive to open discussion. With this support, most teachers, towards the end of the training year, are able to view challenges to teaching as a learning tool, rather than personal criticism.

Furthermore, when teachers in a training group begin to understand that each inservice session is an *inquiry* into what the particular children know how to do and what they need to learn how to do next, then they are better able to understand that the challenges to teaching are an inquiry into how best to match teaching to individual children. And then, teachers are able to look at their own teaching as an inquiry, rather than "how to get it right" to please the teacher leader or to look good in front of the group. Therefore, another construct that is useful to consider in interpreting sociocultural theory in Reading Recovery training is *inquiry*.

The Role of Inquiry

Closely linked with the notion of a community-of-learners concept is the notion of inquiry. A community of learners comes together in order to inquire into questions of relevance to the topic under study, and hopefully, to the learners themselves. I suggest that inquiry is a key thread throughout the description of the original design of the training program and it continues to be the unifying thread in Reading Recovery training. Each teaching session is an inquiry into how the child is learning and an exploration of what teaching moves might be made in order to foster the child's further learning.

As teacher leaders, it is important to keep this principle of inquiry always in the forefront when training teachers, because we really do not know what is going on in either the child's head or the teachers' heads. We can only infer, and therefore, we must be tentative. All suggestions are really hypotheses yet to be tested. We begin to make hypotheses about both the child's processing and the teacher's teaching at the beginning of a teaching session when we hear some information about the child; then, we test and often change our hypotheses as we watch the lesson. The value in having eight to twelve people watching the same lesson is that we get to discuss our hypotheses with others; we learn that someone else interprets behavior in a different way and can explain why. We defend our hypotheses and come to clarify even more our thinking about teaching and learning. Gordon Wells (1994) noted:

> It is not simply that, when faced with a problem, two heads are better than one, but that, by struggling to make explicit to the other group members one's perception of the problem and one's tentative ideas for its solution, one clarifies and extends one's understanding of the problem as a whole—for oneself as well as for the others. (p. 247)

Conclusion

The sociocultural theory predicts that human knowledge is socially constructed through shared activities and communication. Reading Recovery teacher training is organized to provide both shared activities (teaching demonstrations) and opportunity for communication (discussions). Teacher leaders and trainers can better understand, plan for, and evaluate Reading Recovery training by following the principles of a community-of-learners model and by fostering inquiry in each inservice session. Although the constructs of community-of-learners and inquiry are current North American frames for understanding teaching and learning, they were inherent in the original design of the Reading Recovery teacher training program. The principles of the community-of-learners model and inquiry provide useful guidelines for fostering teacher transformations in thinking and teaching.

References

Bedrova, E., & Leong, D. J. (1996). *Tools of the mind: the Vygotskian approach to early childhood education.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Berk, L. E., & Winsler, A. (1995). *Scaffolding children's learning: Vygotsky and early childhood education.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Clay, M., & Watson, B. (1982). An inservice program for Reading Recovery teachers. In M. Clay, *Observing young readers: Selected papers* (pp. 192-201). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Mercer, N. (1995). *The guided construction of knowledge: Talk amongst teachers and learners.* Philadelphia, PA: Multilingual Matters LTD.

Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

continued on next page

Reading Recovery Teacher Training:

continued from previous page

Rogoff, B, Matusov, E, & White, C. (1996). Models of teaching and learning: Participation in a community of learners. In D. R. Olson & N. Torrance (Eds.), *The handbook of education and human development* (pp. 388-414). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Tharp, R. G., & Gallimore, R. (1988). *Rousing minds to life: Teaching, learning, and schooling in social context*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). *Thought and language*. (E. Hanfmann & G. Vakar, Eds. & Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Original work published 1934)

Wells, G. (1994). *Changing schools from within: Creating communities of inquiry*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Wertsch, J. V. (Ed.). (1985). *Culture, communication, and cognition: Vygotskian perspectives*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.